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Judith Ryan

“Pfeile mit Widerhaken”: On the Aphorisms in Goethe’s *Wahlverwandtschaften* and *Wanderjahre*¹

In a letter to Wilhelm in which she describes how she found the key to the mysterious “Kästchen,” Hersilie includes a sketch of the object along with a remarkable commentary:

Hier aber, mein Freund, nun schließlich zu dieser Abbildung des Rätsels was sagen Sie? Erinnert es nicht an Pfeile mit Widerhaken? Gott sei uns gnädig! (FA 10, 599)²

In the Middle Ages, barbed arrows were used for killing horses in battle; if one accidentally wounded a knight, the only way to prevent serious damage was to push the arrow further through his body and cut off the barb when it emerged on the other side.³ The protagonist of Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso* describes his rejection by the princess as precisely such a barbed arrow, and begs his friend Antonio to pull on it so that he can feel all the more keenly the force that tears him apart (V, 5). In contrast, Hersilie’s exclamation “Gott sei uns gnädig!” is not meant so earnestly. After all, she knows that the key is not really a barb, but simply “ein winzig kleines, stachlichtes Etwas” that she has found in the jacket of Felix’s friend Fitz (FA 10, 598).

Most critics interpret Hersilie’s description of the key as a barbed arrow by visualizing it as an arrow shot by Cupid that sticks fast and cannot be pulled out.⁴ I would like to show, however, that the metaphor goes well beyond this familiar cultural reference. The puzzling key is one of three objects in the *Wanderjahre* that have, as it

were, two aspects: Wilhelm's medical kit, described as "halb Brieftasche, halb Besteck" (FA 10, 299), the casket itself, at once a "Kästchen" and a "Prachtbüchlein" (FA 10, 302), and the key whose shape resembles "Pfeile mit Widerhaken" (FA 10, 599). These hybrid objects, I argue, are connected in crucial ways with the aphorisms that are included at the end of books two and three of the *Wanderjahre*. What ties them together is their fundamental ambiguity and the challenge it poses for the reader of the novel.

Before approaching the aphorism collections in the *Wanderjahre*, it will be helpful to look first at those in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. As Gerhard Neumann has demonstrated, the aphorisms in Otilie's "Tagebuch" are artfully composed: on the one hand, they form "ein festes Schema" and on the other, they contain "arationale Momente."⁵ "Die 'intendierte Ganzheit' der Erkenntnis," he continues, "beruht paradoxerweise gerade auf der Offenheit und inneren Beweglichkeit der Gruppe."⁶ Building on Neumann's insight, I see this paradox of the aphorisms as at once a reflection of Otilie's nature and a structure she is fundamentally incapable of grasping. In essence, her diary is a commonplace book in which she notes thoughts and observations and, in the later parts of the novel, copies other people's aphorisms from a book someone has given her. Copying out aphorisms and maxims was a technique frequently used in the 16th and 17th centuries to familiarize pupils with Latin vocabulary and syntax; gradually, the learner acquired a differentiated understanding of entire thematic fields.⁷ In discussions about the usefulness of commonplace books during the 17th and 18th centuries, proponents of the method argued that it served to inculcate rational principles of memorization.⁸ Otilie, however, is incapable of learning in this way, as the assistant at her boarding school explains, because she needs to have connections spelled out

explicitly: “Sie steht unfähig, ja stöckisch vor einer leicht faßlichen Sache, die für sie mit nichts zusammenhängt. Kann man aber die Mittelglieder finden und ihr deutlich machen, so ist ihr das Schwerste begreiflich” (FA 8, 294). Copying aphorisms is precisely the wrong method to induct her into the educated culture of her day, because these highly condensed reflections depend on the learner’s ability to perceive connections at which they only hint.

This becomes apparent when Otilie copies well-known aphorisms and explains them in a subtly skewed ways. Puzzled by the interest those around her take in drawings of monkeys, she cites Alexander Pope’s dictum that “the proper study of mankind is man” (FA 8, 453). Yet her friends’ fascination with the ape pictures derives precisely from their sense that the animals reveal something about the behavior of human beings. Similarly, when Otilie tries to interpret the maxim “Es gibt [...] für den Kammerdiener keinen Helden” (no man is a hero to his valet), she comes to the absurd conclusion that only a hero can recognize a hero: “Der Kammerdiener wird aber wahrscheinlich seinesgleichen zu schätzen wissen” (FA 8, 433). And when she notes that it is pleasant to imagine resting near one’s loved ones in the grave, she elaborates on the idea by commenting: “‘Zu den Seinigen versammelt werden’ ist ein so herzlicher Ausdruck” (FA 8, 403). She uses the word “herzlich” here in the sense of “touching the heart,” of course, yet she seems not to find it troubling that death is the precondition of being gathered to one’s own. By the same token, when she reflects on the notion of “das Schickliche,” she confuses it with the idea of good manners, clearly because she can only think in terms of the concrete reality she knows:

Wenn wir mit Menschen leben, die ein zartes Gefühl für das Schickliche haben, so wird es uns angst um ihretwillen, wenn etwas Ungeschicktes begegnet. So fühle ich immer für und mit Charlotten, wenn jemand mit dem Stuhl schaukelt, weil sie das in den Tod nicht leiden kann. (FA 8, 432)

This bizarre example makes it all too apparent how little suited Otilie is to abstract thinking.⁹ The reference to a person rocking back on a chair is clearly her own awkward attempt to illustrate a sophisticated concept. As Harald Fricke comments: “Was hätten Otilie und Charlotte wohl zu Tischbeins [Bild] mit dem lesend auf seinem Stuhl schaukelnden Goethe gesagt?”¹⁰ In other words, the thought that Otilie expresses here may not have been shared by the author of the novel. More importantly for my argument about her treatment of commonplaces, her explanations are just as much “grafted” onto the aphorisms she copies as the new shoots that Eduard attaches to more robust rootstocks in the opening scene of the novel. Under her hands, the aphorisms themselves become hybrid entities, formed partly from other people’s ideas and partly from her own homespun interpretations.

Her idiosyncratic observations in the “Tagebuch” move it closer to the more personal connotations that attach to the word “diary” in its present-day use. Nonetheless, the reader needs to be aware that the word “Tagebuch” did not have these associations in Goethe’s day. Originally, the term referred to a notebook used for keeping track of daily expenditures. Eighteenth-century book-keeping practice required that these often hasty daily notations be transcribed more neatly into a second notebook.¹¹ Lichtenberg gives a detailed description of this kind of bookkeeping and suggests that the example might well be followed by scholars in their own note-keeping practices:

Die Kaufleute haben ihr Waste book (Sudelbuch, Klitterbuch glaube ich im deutschen), darin tragen sie von Tag zu Tag alles ein was sie verkaufen und kaufen, alles durcheinander ohne Ordnung, aus diesem wird es in das Journal getragen, wo alles mehr systematisch steht, und endlich kommt es in den Leidger [= ledger, JR] at double entrance nach der italienischen Art Buchzuhalten. [...] Dieses verdient von den Gelehrten nachgeahmt zu werden. Erst ein Buch worin ich alles einschreibe, so wie ich es sehe oder wie es mir meine Gedanken eingeben, alsdann kann dieses wieder in ein anderes getragen werden, wo die Materien mehr abgesondert und geordnet sind, und der Leidger könnte dann die Verbindung und die daraus fließende Erläuterung der Sache in einem ordentlichen Ausdruck enthalten.¹²

I do not know whether Lichtenberg was familiar with John Locke's essay, "A New Method of the Common-Place Book" (1706), in which he had proposed a similar method according to which the individual quotations should be rewritten, organized under thematic rubrics, and numbered in such a way as to make cross-references apparent.¹³ Be that as it may, the centrality of the "Sudelbuch" to Lichtenberg's own philosophy made him reflect on the two-stage process in which an earlier jotting suddenly appears unfamiliar when re-read before it is transcribed to a more organized format. At such a moment, Lichtenberg feels divided between his earlier and his later thoughts. In this respect, as Matthew Bell comments, his aphoristic writings exemplify a new, psychologically oriented approach to the relation of knowledge and consciousness.¹⁴

Otilie never does progress to this second, more reflective and systematic phase. In contrast, Eduard, her counterpart in the novel, has long wanted to reorganize his travel

diaries in order to assemble “aus diesen unschätzbaren, aber verworrenen Heften und Blättern ein für uns und andre erfreuliches Ganze” (FA 8, 276). Yet he does not actually do so. Instead, he leaves it to his friend the Hauptmann to create an archive where his papers are arranged in various containers, cabinets, and cubby holes according to different rubrics (FA 8, 296-97). In *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, Makarie has set up an even more elaborate archive of a similar kind, located in a separate room where everything is neatly arranged in cupboards furnished with identifying labels: “Rubriken mancher Art deuteten auf den verschiedensten Inhalt, Einsicht und Ordnung leuchtete hervor” (FA 10, 388). It is not enough merely to collect information and ideas, one must also organize them in a logical, systematic manner. The aphorisms at the end of the second and third books of the *Wanderjahre* are taken from Makarie’s archive. As parts of a rationally ordered whole, they differ radically from the aphorisms in Ottilie’s notebook. Given the complex structural and thematic relations between *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* and the *Wanderjahre*, we would doubtless not be wrong to read the aphorism collections of the later novel as a critical comment on those of the earlier one.

In both novels, mercury (“Quecksilber”) is used to illustrate the phenomenon of separation and reunion. In the “chemical conversation” of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, Eduard deploys it as a metaphor for human relationships, and in the *Wanderjahre*, it is connected with the effect of aphorisms on the mind. When Makarie is unable to sleep at night, she asks her companion, Angela, to read aloud a page from the archive. On such occasions, a thousand details seem to leap out, “eben als wenn eine Masse Quecksilber fällt und sich nach allen Seiten hin in die vielfachsten unzähligen Kügelchen zerteilt” (FA 10, 388). In both novels, the elusive and slippery nature of mercury is a crucial aspect of

the metaphor. Similarly, Hersilie describes the key that does not seem to open the casket as something that continually escapes one's grasp: "Und was das wieder für Umstände sind! Das schiebt sich und verschiebt sich" (FA 10, 599), she exclaims.¹⁵ The same might well be said of Makarie's mercurial aphorisms.

Although Eckermann claimed that the aphorisms were inserted into the *Wanderjahre* purely in order to meet the page count required for the second and third books in the *Ausgabe letzter Hand* (1829),¹⁶ Goethe himself argued two years after publication of the novel that the aphorism collections were a "Vehikel [...] um eine Masse sehr bedeutender Dinge schicklich in die Welt zu bringen."¹⁷ Important readings of the novel by Hans Vaget, Dieter Borchmeyer, and Erhard Bahr have taught us that we should not misunderstand Goethe's statement to mean that the novel brings together the wisdom of his older years.¹⁸ Rather, we must find a different way to look at the aphorism collections. Taking a cue from Hans Vaget's conception of the *Wanderjahre* as a "Leseexerzitium,"¹⁹ I propose that the aphorisms within the novel provoke the reader to focus on different modes of reading and understanding.

Among other things, they ask us to reflect on the novel's relationship to other texts and other writers. Toward the end of the second aphorism collection in the *Wanderjahre* we find a number of comments on Shakespeare and Calderon, and finally a whole series of reflections about Laurence Sterne, together with several quotations from a text that was thought at the time to have been written by Sterne himself. This text, actually the work of an imitator named Richard Griffith, appeared under the title *Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased*. In Houghton Library, Harvard, I was able to consult a 1771 German translation of this book.²⁰ The title is *Der*

*Koran, oder, Das Leben, die Gemüthsart und die Empfindungen des Herrn Tria junctis in uno, M.K.K. das ist Meister Keiner Künste.*²¹ The book consists of three parts because, as the author says, other books also come in three parts. The first part is a somewhat less than witty parody of *Tristram Shandy*, while the last two parts consist entirely of aphorisms. In addition to three aphorisms drawn from Sterne's letters, several other aphorisms included in the *Wanderjahre* come from these sections of Griffith's book. In the introduction to the book, its author explains that the word "Koran" means "chapter" in Arabic,²² and that its use in title of his book should not be taken to mean that he has suddenly become a Muslim. Rather, he says, he has taken a liking to books with short chapters, especially those with gaps or white lines between them, which, he claims, make a book swell up like a bladder (Griffith, 11) and thus, we are to presume, more effectively stimulate the reader's imagination. We can read Goethe's borrowings from Sterne and the pseudo-Sterne, Griffith, as suggestions that the *Wanderjahre* should be seen as a book constituted, like *Tristram Shandy*, of gaps, leaps, and detours.

Indeed, Wilhelm's adopted son Felix shares something of Sterne's mercurial nature. When Wilhelm finds the boy happily writing away in Makarie's archive, Felix declares that he is interested only in "Schreiben und Reiten"—an odd combination, one might think. In contrast, the systematic education of the "Pädagogische Provinz," as we subsequently discover, does not suit Felix at all. In the final chapter of the narrative, Felix falls from his horse when it stumbles at the edge of a steep bank beside a river. Now we see what writing in Makarie's archive has in common with horseback-riding: in the one case, the boy's mind leaps over the gaps between aphorisms as his hand copies them out, in the other, his body plunges into the water when his mount stumbles at the edge of the

cliff. The quicksilver Felix, in other words, is the exact opposite of Otilie, who is fundamentally unable to deal with anything disjointed.

In a note to Hersilie's letter about the key, Goethe writes: "Ist rückwärts und vorwärts zu betrachten!" (FA 10, 809). Mittermüller understands this note to mean that Hersilie's letter should be read with regard to the larger structure of the novel, looking at the inset story "Die neue Melusine" on the one hand and the frame narrative on the other.²³ I believe, however, that the note has further and more interesting implications. In the early part of the novel, two types of reading are contrasted when Wilhelm, Hersilie, and her sister Juliette discuss the inscriptions above the doors in the house of the two women's uncle.²⁴ While Wilhelm reads the inscriptions forwards, Hersilie insists on reading them "backwards": this, she claims, is how women read. She demonstrates the technique using the inscription "Vom Nützlichen durchs Wahre zum Schönen" as her example.²⁵ In her reversed version, a beautiful woman ("Die Schöne") finds a husband, then attains truth ("das Wahre"), and finally makes herself useful by looking after household and children (FA 10, 326). Hersilie and her sister Juliette play with reading the inscriptions forwards and backwards until even Wilhelm finally agrees that "es sind Sprüche darunter, die sich in sich selbst zu vernichten scheinen" (FA 10, 328). In this moment he becomes, as it were, an early proponent of what we would today call deconstruction. Hersilie's explanation for such self-contradictory inscriptions is that her uncle adopted many of them from eastern sources: "Dergleichen Inschriften, scheint es, hat der Oheim von den Orientalen genommen, die an allen Wänden die Sprüche des Korans mehr verehren als verstehen" (FA 10, 328). We should not forget, in this connection, that Arabic script runs from right to left, and is thus, from the Western

perspective, a reversal of the accustomed direction taken by writing and reading. In a subsequent conversation with Hersilie's uncle, Wilhelm expresses his preference for short sayings that "anregen, das Entgegengesetzte zu überschauen und in Übereinstimmung zu bringen" (FA 10, 331). The uncle, for his part, regards the task of bringing opposites together as the fundamental occupation of any "vernünftiger Mann" (ibid.). In this sense, then, the exercise of interpreting aphorisms appears as practice in a principle essential to conducting one's life.

I see the image of the barbed arrow against the backdrop of this conversation about the inscriptions above the doors. An arrow with a barb has two points oriented in two different directions. Sayings also have "points," though some are more pointed than others. Indeed, a recent review of a collection of aphorisms described the most desirable feature of the genre as follows: "What you really want, or I do, is pithiness and heft with clean lines and a flick in the tail."²⁶ In the *Wanderjahre*, Goethe expresses this idea precisely in the metaphor of the "Widerhaken" that gives an aphorism its intellectual edge.

Otilie, unable to understand irony, ambivalence, and ambiguity, does not possess Hersilie's and Wilhelm's ability to deploy complex strategies of reading and interpretation. To be sure, one of the aphorisms Otilie copies into her diary is "Jedes ausgesprochene Wort erregt den Gegensinn" (FA 8, 419), a maxim that seems, at first blush, to indicate a certain sense for linguistic complexity. But as Harald Fricke notes, Otilie embeds this statement in a series of maxims restricted to a very particular context: speaking in public and conversing in a social situation:²⁷

Wer vor andern lange allein spricht, ohne den Zuhörern zu schmeicheln, erregt Widerwillen.

Jedes ausgesprochene Wort erregt den Gegensinn.

Widerspruch und Schmeichelei machen beide ein schlechtes Gespräch. (ibid.)

In this context, the second of the three aphorisms is not at all a statement about the nature of language as such. Rather, the phrase explains how listeners react to a long boring speech when they are forced to sit and listen to it.

It is well known that in Goethe's works, the technique of "Spiegelungen" functions as an important recognition of the reversibility of narrative structures. Instead of rehearsing familiar versions of this technique,²⁸ I would like now to consider the left- and right-hand twisted yarns we learn about in Lenardo's "Tagebuch." This document takes the form of a report with dated entries (and, as we know, Goethe based this section of the novel on an actual report he had solicited). Inserted into the larger fabric of the narrative, Lenardo's exceedingly technical account of the cottage spinning and weaving industry seems at first to be something of a foreign body within the narrative. Nonetheless, the report also reflects on the novel as a whole by drawing attention to the fact that a text—like cloth, from which the word text derives—is made according to its own individual method. Like the English word "yarn," the German "Garn" means both thread and story. Sometimes the thread of the narrative twists, as it were, in one direction; at other times, it twines the opposite way. This links Lenardo's diary with the following aphorism from the "Betrachtungen im Sinne der Wanderer":

Das *Was* des Kunstwerks interessiert die Menschen mehr als das *Wie*; jenes können sie einzeln begreifen, dieses im ganzen nicht fassen. Daher kommt das

Herausheben von Stellen, wobei zuletzt, wenn man wohl aufmerkt, die Wirkung der Totalität auch nicht ausbleibt, aber jedem unbewußt.” (FA 10, 567-68).

Aphorisms are precisely the sort of short text that can exist both inside and outside a larger context, as is shown by the ways in which the aphorisms of the *Wanderjahre* have been taken for Goethe’s own words of wisdom. When Ottilie copies maxims from a book of aphorisms, the reader recognizes that she often misunderstands—or only half-understands—them. By contrast, when Goethe inserts borrowed aphorisms supposedly from Laurence Sterne into his novel, the new context gives them a subtly different meaning. Although the specific function of the aphorism collections in the two novels differs because of the fictional figures to whom they are attributed, the two demonstrations of how aphorisms change as they are taken out of context or move out of one context into another have much in common. Indeed, Goethe uses the aphorisms to address a question that was also on the minds of his contemporaries, especially the Romantics, with their love of inset stories and lyrics, which they often published separately from the longer narratives in which they first appeared.²⁹

Among the aphorisms that Goethe included in his journal *Über Kunst und Altertum*, one about Lichtenberg has particular relevance here:

Lichtenbergs Schriften können wir als der wunderbarsten Wünschelrute bedienen; wo er einen Spaß macht, liegt ein Problem verborgen. (FA 13, 167)

We might connect the word “Wünschelrute” with the primitive magic that Wilhelm perceives in his medical kit, which he carries with him “als eine Art von Fetisch” (FA 10, 299). As Hartmut Böhme shown, the casket and its key are increasingly fetishized, while the medical kit is ultimately defetishized.³⁰ At the end of the narrative, when Wilhelm

uses the lancet to bring his son back to life after his fall from the cliff (FA 10, 744), the medical kit is no longer a magic object, but simply a practical aid. We might link this reversal in the relationship between the medical kit and the casket with the conversation about reading inscriptions both backward and forward. Whereas Wilhelm learns the secret of how to use the medical kit, the casket remains mysterious, since only the goldsmith knows how to use the key to open it, yet when he does, there appears to be nothing inside. Frustrating though this may be, I would argue that there is no need to resolve this puzzle. This is because the entire plot line involving the key is designed to familiarize us with larger problems concerning the phenomenon of ambiguity. Had *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* remained embedded in the *Wanderjahre*, we would have been alerted to these issues through the negative example of Ottilie and her difficulties in construing aphorisms. Taken as a prelude to the *Wanderjahre*, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* prepares us to become better readers—readers more alert to the inherent antinomies of sophisticated thought. Within this context, the key is not only an object that resembles “Pfeile mit Widerhaken.” It is also the barbed version of another object that, far from causing life-threatening wounds, bears within it the powers of healing: the unbarbed lancet with which Wilhelm restores life to Felix at the end of the narrative. Schooled by the text itself in the art of reading “both forward and backward,” we must now recognize the lancet as the positive version of the barbed arrow. Like the medical kit that looks like a briefcase, the casket that looks like a book, and the key that looks like barbed arrows, the aphorisms are also double-faced objects. By learning to read them in their full ambiguity, we begin to understand the mechanism by which the literary text, even when

it probes too deep for comfort (as suggested by the image of the barbed arrow), also
exerts profoundly healing powers (as suggested by the lancet).

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¹ This essay is a revised version of a talk I gave at two different times in differing formats. I am grateful to Dieter Borchmeyer for inviting me to give a German version in Heidelberg in July 2006, and to the Goethe Society of North America for asking me to present a shortened, English version at the MLA convention in December, 2007. I would like to thank both audiences for their helpful contributions and suggestions. I am grateful to Jane Brown for correcting a slip of my memory.

² *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* is cited according to the Frankfurter Ausgabe vol. 10, ed. Gerhard Neumann and Hans-Georg Dewitz; *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* is cited according to the Frankfurter Ausgabe vol. 8, ed. Waltraut Wiethölter in collaboration with Christoph Brecht.

³ The large barbed war-arrow known as a “broadhead,” when shot from a powerful longbow, was particularly dangerous to horses. The use of this weaponry to lame and kill enemy horses was in large measure the cause of the English victory over the French at Crécy in 1346

(<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Lane/8771/crecy.html> [accessed 6/13/08]). The method proved its merit again at Poitiers and Agincourt. On the havoc caused by the onslaught of English arrows in the battle of Crécy, see Charles Boutell, *Arms and Armour in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Also a Descriptive Notice of Modern Weapons*, trans. M.P. Lacombe (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, 1996) 134-35.

⁴ See, for example, André Gilg, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre und ihre Symbole* (Zurich: Atlantis, 1954) 136. Hans-Georg Dewitz also writes of “Verwundung durch Pfeile der Liebe” in this connection (FA 10, 1189).

⁵ *Ideenparadiese: Untersuchungen zur Aphoristik von Lichtenberg, Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel und Goethe* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976) 683, 710, 720.

⁶ *Ideenparadiese*, 725.

⁷ Matthias Senger, “Leonhard Culmanns *Sententiae Pueriles*. Zur Sentenz als einer prägenden Denkform vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert” in: *Literatur und Volk im 17. Jahrhundert: Probleme populärer Kultur in Deutschland*, ed. Wolfgang Brückner et al. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1985) 777-795, esp. 779.

⁸ Earle Havens, “‘Of Common Places, Or Memorial Books’: An Anonymous Manuscript on Commonplace Books and the Art of Memory in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Yale University Library Gazette* (April 2002): 136-153. The anonymous manuscript states: “Minds cannot be duly formed without the subservience of a *rational memory* which, retaining the remarkable passages of the learned, presents them as worthy matter of thoughts, and apt incitement to an imitation. [...] Memory is greatly assisted by a rational *method*, and *writing* common place books partakes of both, being no other than a *methodical writing* of things which would else have no connection between them” (147; italics in original).

⁹ Harald Fricke notes that many editions of Goethe’s “Maximen und Reflexionen” omit either the second sentence or the entire aphorism (*Sprüche in Prosa*, FA 13, 1072). Fricke comments that “das Wort ‘Ungeschicktes’ bedeutet hier nicht ‘ungelenk’ oder ‘unbeholfen’, sondern ‘unschicklich’” (ibid.). Nonetheless, Ottilie’s use of this word slides awkwardly from one meaning to the other.

¹⁰ *Sprüche in Prosa*, FA 13, 1072.

¹¹ Earle Havens shows that “the common place book was not merely seen as a discrete category of information collection, but rather as a constituent of the broader intellectual exercise of gathering and storing information of every sort for efficient reference and practical application.” (“Of Common Places,” 146). Thus, both double-entry account books and commonplace books fell under the same larger rubric.

¹² Lichtenberg, *Sudelbücher* E46 (1775-1776) in *Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Franz H. Mautner (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1983) I, 21.

¹³ Stephen Colclough, “Recovering the Reader: Commonplace Books and Diaries as Sources of Reading Experience”, in *Publishing History* XLIII (1998): 5-37; here p. 6.

¹⁴ “The Idea of Fragmentariness in German Literature and Philosophy, 1760-1800,” *The Modern Language Review* 89 (1994): 391.

¹⁵ On this topic, see Christian Mittermüller, “‘Das schiebt sich und verschiebt sich’—poetologische Reflexionen in Goethes Romanen ‘Die Wahlverwandtschaften’ und ‘Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre’”, *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 121 (2004): 53-65. In connection with ambiguous nature of the casket and the medical kit, Mittermüller comments: “Gerade die Konstruktion von Ambiguitäten und Ambivalenzen, die sich dem Zugriff festlegender Interpretation verweigern, stimuliert den Versuch einer hermeneutischen Sinnfindung” (58).

¹⁶ Cf. Dewitz, FA 10, 1144-1145.

¹⁷ See Erhard Bahr's afterword to *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982) 528.

¹⁸ Hans Rudolf Vaget argues that the notion of "Altersweiheit" in the *Wanderjahre* should be taken with skepticism ("Johann Wolfgang Goethe: *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* [1829]" in *Romane und Erzählungen zwischen Romantik und Realismus*, ed. Paul Michael Lützeler [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983], 136-164, esp. 160). Dieter Borchmeyer emphasizes the "Verzicht auf klare auktoriale Sinngebung" in the aphorisms and the freedom this permits the reader in interpreting them (*Weimarer Klassik: Porträt einer Epoche* [Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1994] 526). Erhard Bahr, finally, argues that the aphorisms in the *Wanderjahre* should not be read as direct expressions of Goethe's own opinions; in this sense, he maintains, the novel can be regarded as an anticipation of Roland Barthes's concept of the "death of the author" (*The Novel as Archive: The Genesis, Reception, and Criticism of Goethe's "Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre"* [Camden House, 1998] 99-102).

¹⁹ Vaget (n.17) 142-145.

²⁰ The translator is given as J.G. Gellius (Leipzig: Bey Engelhardt Benjamin Schwickert, 1771).

²¹ The binding includes the name Richard Griffith and the title *Yoriks nachgelaßne Werke*, but this is presumably of a later date, since Goethe and his contemporaries did not know that Griffith was the author of the volume.

²² The significance of the word "Koran" is not explained in Hans-Georg Dewitz's note on this book (FA 10, 1268).

²³ "'Das schiebt sich und verschiebt sich,'" 63-64.

²⁴ For an astute analysis of this episode, see Birgit Baldwin, "*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* as an Allegory of Reading," *Goethe Yearbook: Publications of the Goethe Society of North America* V (1990): 213-232, esp. 217-218. Baldwin also comments perceptively on the difference between the two sisters, Hersilie and Juliette.

²⁵ Martin Walser puts an amusing wrinkle on this aphorism in his novel *Ein liebender Mann* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2008) when he has Goethe think about it in connection with Amalie von Levetzow's refusal of his request for her daughter's hand in marriage. Expressing her reservations about the proposal, Amalie suggests that Ulrike will be pleased to be "nützlich" to Goethe instead (120). Immediately reminded of the aphorism "Vom Nützlichen durchs Wahre zum Schönen," Goethe allows his thoughts to be shaped by what he calls "Leserinnen des Manns von fünfzig Jahren" (where the maxim does not occur, of course). Walser's Goethe reflects: "nichts anderes wollte er" (p. 120). Why does Goethe think here of female readers? Is he reading the maxim from right to left, as Hersilie does in the *Wanderjahre*? In that case, it would describe the trajectory of a beautiful woman from the object of desire to the practical helpmeet of the man she marries. However he understands it—and it is part of the art of this novel to leave such things unspoken—he takes comfort in his recollection of the aphorism: "So restaurierte er sorgfältig sein Empfinden, seine Perspektiven, seine Situation" (120). The reader familiar with the episode in the *Wanderjahre* cannot help but see this passage in Walser's novel as ambivalent: while Amalie works to reduce Ulrike's relationship to Goethe from the beautiful object of his desire to the role of a merely "useful" friend, the great poet indulges in self-gratifying fantasies that depend not on forward or "male" approaches, but on reverse or "female" modes of reading.

²⁶ Katherine Powers, Boston Globe, Dec. 16, 2007.

²⁷ Afterword to *Sprüche in Prosa*, ed. Harald Fricke (Frankfurt a.M. and Leipzig: Insel, 2005) 474-5.

²⁸ One of the most obvious is the relationship between the inset novella "Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder" and the *Wahlverwandtschaften* as a whole.

²⁹ See Judith Ryan, "Hybrid Forms in German Romanticism," in *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. Karl Reichl and Joseph Harris, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1997) 165-181.

³⁰ Hartmut Böhme, "Fetisch und Idol: Die Temporalität von Erinnerungsformen in Goethes *Wilhelm Meister, Faust*, und *Der Sammler und die Seinigen*" in Peter Matussek, ed., *Goethe und die Verzeitlichung der Natur* (München, 1998) 178-202.